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## ABSTRACT

A total of 107 Arkansas kindergarten teachers responded to a questionnaire designed to identify their attitudes and practices. The questionnaire elicited information concerning the teachers' experiential background, the methods and materials they used to teach reading skills, the prereading and reading skills taught, and their opinions about reading instruction in kindergarten. The results showed that the majority of respondents had more than three years of teaching experience and had completed one or more reading methods courses. The majority also indicated that they used commercial and teacher-made worksheets, taught phonics skills, and gave instruction in writing letters of the alphabet. Seventy-six percent of the teachers responded that they were opposed to formal reading instruction in kindergarten, preferring instead a more traditional readiness language development program. The actual teaching practices reported, however, suggest that these teachers go beyond such a program in their instruction. (FL)

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A Survey of Kindergarten Reading Practices in Arkansas

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In recent years numerous articles have appeared in professional journals relevant to beginning and preschool reading experiences. Few studies, however, have described the current classroom practices of kindergarten teachers. La Conte (1970) found, that while the majority of kindergarten teachers advocate informal instruction, over one-third were teaching reading skills and using some reading materials. Sheridan (1972) compared actual teacher practices in reading readiness programs with the practices advocated by educational experts. Instructional practices in the classroom were found to differ significantly from those by the experts. In a recent study Wilson (1976) analyzed kindergarten curriculum guides of 13 large cities to detect instruc-

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tional trends. Wilson's findings indicated a trend toward reading instruction in the kindergarten.

The purpose of this study was to survey the kindergarten teachers of Arkansas to determine the attitudes and practices of public school kindergarten teachers.

### Procedures

Public school kindergarten is a relatively new program in the state of Arkansas. A four-year kindergarten pilot project was begun during the 1969-70 school year and a statewide funded program started in 1973. Based on information supplied by the Arkansas Department of Education, it was determined that 363 local public school districts in the state employing approximately 1274 teachers had regular kindergarten units during the 1977-78 academic year; two districts held only summer kindergarten programs. A questionnaire was devised and sent to superintendents of 37 randomly selected school districts during the fall of 1978 for distribution to kindergarten teachers. Completed returned questionnaires were received from better than 78% of the school districts queried. A total of 107 Arkansas kindergarten teachers responded to the research survey. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the following information: the experiential background of kindergarten teachers; the methods and materials of teaching reading related skills; the prereading and reading skills taught; and teacher opinion of teaching reading in the kindergarten and how it should be taught.

### Findings

Of the 107 kindergarten teachers who responded to the questionnaire, approximately ten percent had no kindergarten teaching experience while 65% had three or more years of experience. Teachers were asked to state the total number of reading methods courses they had completed. Eight percent indicated they had completed no reading methods courses while 54% had finished one or two courses and 28% three or more. Ten percent did not complete this item.

When teachers were asked their opinion of whether or not formal reading instruction should be taught in the kindergarten 23% said yes with some reservations; 76% said no.

Table 1 summarizes the teachers' responses to the types of materials and strategies which they employ in reading-related instruction.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Teachers were also asked to state whether or not they teach various reading and language arts related skills. The teachers' responses are summarized in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Questionnaire respondents were given the opportunity to list other reading skills which they taught. In answer to this open-ended

Table 1  
Reading-related Materials or Strategies  
Used by Kindergarten Teachers

| Item                                                | Percentage |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|----|
|                                                     | Yes        | No |
| Reading readiness workbooks                         | 32         | 59 |
| Commercial duplicated readiness materials           | 72         | 22 |
| Teacher-made charts and language experience stories | 94         | 4  |
| Teacher-made readiness work sheets                  | 82         | 13 |
| Preprimers or primers                               | 17         | 69 |
| Grouping for instruction                            | 57         | 39 |
| Ability grouping for instruction                    | 57         | 37 |

Table 2  
Reading and Language Arts Related  
Skills Taught in Kindergarten

| Skill                              | Percentage |    |
|------------------------------------|------------|----|
|                                    | Yes        | No |
| Recognition of letters of alphabet | 96         | 1  |
| Sounds represented by letters      | 90         | 5  |
| Initial consonant sounds           | 88         | 9  |
| Rhyming words                      | 96         | 2  |
| Sight word vocabulary              | 65         | 28 |
| Writing letters of alphabet        | 83         | 14 |
| Writing of child's name            | 99         | 1  |

question about other reading skills taught in the kindergarten teachers mentioned the following: relational concepts, left to right and top to bottom progression; auditory and visual memory, discrimination and interpretation; predicting outcomes; and listening skills and language development.

A final question requesting the teachers' opinions of teaching reading in the kindergarten and how it should be taught was asked. The vast majority of teachers responded that they did not think that formal reading should be taught in the kindergarten, but that a more traditional readiness language development program should be employed. Developing positive self-concepts and attitudes was a goal stressed by many teachers. A few teachers responded that reading should be taught to those children who are ready, but teachers primarily advocated a language experience approach. The majority of teachers stated that most five-year-olds are not ready to read and that only one or two children within a class are ready. Some first year teachers conceded that their opinions about kindergarten reading might change as they became more experienced. One teacher replied that her college experience did not sufficiently prepare her to answer the question.

### Conclusions

Arkansas kindergarten teachers overwhelmingly state that there should be no formal reading program in the kindergarten. This finding is consistent with the results of La Conte's earlier study (1969). However, just as in La Conte's findings, the teachers are exposing

children to mass readiness and beginning reading skills instruction. The majority of the teachers stated that they are using commercial and teacher-made worksheets, are teaching phonics skills, and are giving instruction in writing the letters of the alphabet. These practices appear to go beyond the definition of the traditional oral language development concept of a readiness program.

### Implications

Based on teacher responses it would appear that reading skills are being taught in the kindergarten. The language experience approach and informal methods of teaching reading are advocated by the majority of teachers. A need for additional teacher training in the area of beginning reading was noted among the respondents. Most teachers stated that children who were ready should begin reading instruction. However, some teachers did not feel prepared to offer reading instruction and expressed the need for in-service training in the area of beginning reading.

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#### ABSTRACT

##### A Survey of Kindergarten Reading Practices in Arkansas

The purpose of this study was to identify to attitudes and practices of Arkansas public school kindergarten teachers. A questionnaire was devised to ascertain teacher experiential background, classroom practices and opinions about reading instruction in the kindergarten. One hundred seven kindergarten teachers responded to the survey instrument. The majority of respondents, while stating they favored informal reading instruction, offered a variety of instruction beyond the level of traditional readiness programs.